Power, Cormac (2010) 'Making Nothing Out of Something: Concepts of Nothingness, Sartre, and the Theatre of Peter Brook', *Consciousness, Literature and the Arts,* 11 (3).

In Peter Handke's 1966 play *Offending the Audience* the 'Four Speakers' step forward onto an empty stage. Much of the play consists of these four speakers issuing a series of denials and negations of the theatrical situation, even to the point of denying the fact of theatrical representation itself. The play seems to ask questions about the theatre's potential to deny what it is, or appears to be, as a material medium. At one point the Speakers address the audience with the following:

> The emptiness of the stage is no picture of another emptiness. The emptiness of this stage signifies nothing. This stage is empty because objects would be in our way. It is empty because we don't need objects. This stage represents nothing. It represents no other emptiness. This stage *is* empty. (Handke, 1971, 16)

The dialogue seems to offer two simultaneous yet contradictory possibilities. The Speakers enact a dematerialising of the stage by relentlessly telling the audience that there is nothing in particular to see, while in the very act of doing so they seem explicitly to draw attention to their presence onstage and to the immediate material context of theatrical representation. While the ironic tone of this play seems to suggest a deliberate self-repudiation of its premise, I wish to pursue this question that Peter Handke sets up: to what extent can theatre "make nothing" of itself, and what, if anything "comes" of making nothing?

Handke's play is not the only example of a radical theatrical reduction. Perhaps the clearest expression of this tendency is found in Jerzy Grotowski's statement in which he proposes a theatre that would divest itself of all unnecessary accoutrements:

> By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous, we found that theatre can exist without make-up, without autonomic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects etc. It cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, "live" communion. (Grotowski, 1991, 19)

The impoverished theatre that Grotowski speaks of is also reflected in the work of many prominent playwrights. Jon Erickson refers to the "immense hollowness and emptiness" that, despite the "obsessive chatter," (Erickson, 1999, 13) lies at heart of the theatre of Chekhov, Pinter and Beckett. This emptiness is perhaps found in its most extreme form in

Beckett's play *Breath* where the reduction includes even the figure of the performer. It is important to note, however, that this nihilating impulse does not (necessarily) point to a form of philosophical nihilism. In Beckett's novel *Molloy*, the protagonist points to nothingness as a figure of almost mystical aspiration:

> For to know nothing is nothing, not to want to know anything likewise, but to be beyond knowing anything, to know you are beyond knowing anything, that is when peace enters in, to the soul of the incurious seeker (Beckett, 1994, 64).

While the Zen like state that Beckett's narrator evokes implies a rejection of signification and a kind of personal *via negativa* of the mind, the principle of negation in Beckett functions more clearly with respect to the narratorial voice. The novel ends as the character Jacques Moran contemplates writing a report on his unsuccessful search for Molloy: "Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining" (1994, 176). In this instance, a concept of nothingness is not directly invoked but arises out of the force of contradiction: one proposition negates the other.

Thinking about nothingness in relation to theatrical representation, however, presents very particular problems. The fact that a theatrical performance frequently involves an audience gathering around a stage to watch one or more performers immediately suggests that there must always be *something*. Moreover, not only is the stage and its components "something" in a material sense, those materials also signify something, or at least are liable to be interpreted as meaning something by an audience. Despite the declarations of Handke's Speakers, surely theatre is ever the staging of something rather than nothing.

The concept of nothing is also controversial within philosophical and scientific contexts. Materialist philosophies from Stoicism in the Ancient World to a modern day materialist such as Gilles Delueze reject the concept of nothingness within their ontological schemas. Modern day quantum physics also calls into question the possibility of nothingness and denies the existence of an absolute void.[1] While concepts of nothingness perhaps find a more natural home within aesthetics, due to art's frequent concern for the non-real and

imaginary, the concept of nothingness has also been critiqued within this domain. Contemporary artist Pierre Bismuth puts the matter very directly:

> It's very simple. Art that claims to be about nothing, absence, silence, emptiness, vacuity, nothingness … never is … Nothingness constitutes a strategy that enables the artists to free his or her activity from any form of social pressure … In art, 'nothing' exists only for those who are ready to believe in it" (Bismuth in Gussin and Carpenter 2001, 181-182).

Here Bismuth alludes to potentially solipsistic tendencies in (strands of modernist?) art whereby the work exists only in relation to itself, regardless of external context of spectatorial interpretation. The claim to represent nothing becomes self-serving and effectively bars a meaningful dialogue with the audience or social world. The problem with "nothing," for Bismuth, is that it exists (if that is the right word), in direct opposition to the "something" that constitutes the milieu of artistic production, spectatorship and political interaction.

While Bismuth's complaints may well amount to a valid critique of particular artists' claims about the meaning of their work, not all conceptions of nothingness operate in such radical opposition to the material world. In other words, the concept of nothing does not always preclude the existence of something. One of the most evocative accounts of nothing can be found in the writings of the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu who points out that emptiness is fundamental to the material world. A cup or vessel is defined by the empty hollow that makes its use possible; the spokes of a wheel meet at the hollow at the centre; the walls of a house contain an empty space while doors presuppose a gap that makes entrance and exit possible. Here nothingness is construed, not as the absolute void, but as operative within the material, helping to shape and define a material reality.[2] The Hindu and Buddhist concept of Śūnyatā establishes a slightly different idea of nothingness. Again, nothingness is not conceived as the inverse of the material but in terms of the insubstantial nature of reality. All objects in the world, including the 'self', are held to have no *independent* existence. Buddhist philosophy emphasises that the existence of every thing is connected to the existence of every other thing, hence the fundamental 'emptiness' of the self and all other objects that deceptively appear to manifest an independent existence.

If these notions of nothingness seem rather far removed from theatrical performance then perhaps we might consider, by way of example, a drama game probably familiar to most drama teachers called “What are you doing?” In this game the participants form a circle and one participant comes into the middle of the circle and enacts a mime of a familiar activity, such as brushing her hair. A second participant enters the circle and asks of the first participant “what are you doing?” The first participant must then respond by naming any activity except the one that she is actually miming, for example “I’m driving a car.” The game continues as the second person then mimes the action “driving a car” until another player enters the circle, asks the question, and receives an answer which changes the activity; thus the game continues until everyone in the circle has contributed an action. This simple warm-up exercise demonstrates the way that nothingness can be seen as operative within theatrical enactment. A principle of negation underpins the movement of the game as each player must answer to the question what they are *not* doing, thus allowing a new action to be introduced. The actions in themselves are ‘empty’ in that they are devoid of context or any sense of believability. The various mimes that participants create are not ends in themselves but merely a means to actualising a series of physical transformations. It is the gap between the question “what are you doing?” and the physicalisation of the response that constitutes the centre of the game, the spokes that meet at the wheel’s hub.

András Kovács traces the modern philosophical concept of nothingness to Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and notes that it is Sartre who “translates the concept into a series of everyday situations where man is alone, disappointed by his beliefs and expectations, desperately looking for something solid in a situation where his own identity is called into question” (Kovács, 2006 136). Sartre’s theory of nothingness, however, is not a negative concept in the traditional sense. Nothingness here does not simply refer to the absence of everything. Rather, nothingness is a fundamental result of the interaction of consciousness and world, and it is through nothingness that the subject defines him/herself.

Nothingness for Sartre therefore, is far from being a purely negative concept. His existentialist project aimed to reveal the potential transcendence of human consciousness from the physical constraints of the world. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre proposed that to define the human being we must first understand that humans *lack* being. Unlike the objects we see and interact with, we can never attain the stable sense of self-identity of mere objects. Permanently faced with choices and an infinite field of thought and action, we forever create who and what we are. Sartre draws the radical conclusion that we are, in a sense, *nothing*: 'human reality is before all else its own nothingness' (Sartre, 2003, 112). Being nothing should not be a cause of despondency though, for it is this refusal to be defined that gives human consciousness its unique sense of freedom. Sartre affirms that 'Man does not exist *first* in order to be free *subsequently*; there is no difference between the being of man and his *being-free*' (Sartre, 2003, 49). Since 'nothingness', in Sartre's evocative image, 'lies coiled at the heart of being – like a worm' (Ibid.), we remain locked in a process of self-realisation that can never be completed. If dissatisfaction with life is a specifically human characteristic, then our consolation is the ever-present possibility to redefine ourselves and our relationship to our realities.

While Sartre manages to locate the concept of nothingness within the concrete relationships between consciousness and world, applying phenomenological perspectives to theatre would at first glance appear to be in conflict with any attempt to relate nothingness to stage representation. Both States (1985) and Garner (1994) emphasise material facticity in their respective studies on theatre and phenomenology. States suggests that "[w]hat the text loses in significative power in the theatre, it gains in corporeal presence" (States 1985, 29), while Garner asserts that theatre can be understood as a "play of actuality" (Garner 1994, 43).[3] Alice Rayner, on the other hand, seems much less committed to a zero-degree materiality in her study *Ghosts, Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (2006), and is more concerned to reveal "a principle of negativity or invisibility within visibility" (Rayner 2006, xi). Discussing Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Rayner pays special

attention to the rude mechanical's performance of *Pyrimus and Thisbe* in which Snout, playing Wall, visually represents a chink through which the lovers can communicate:

> The hole, the permeable place in the boundary, is no-thing … Nothing in itself, the chink in Wall not only makes communication between the opposing sides possible; it also allows us to see that the two worlds are arbitrarily divided into opposition and that they form part of one world. No-thing, as the Buddhists would say, is not simply the opposite of something or nonbeing as distinct from being. Wall, like a curtain, creates the image of duality … but like all the duos of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, court and forest, play and audience, dream and waking, the two parts interpenetrate (Rayner 2006, 152).

In Rayner's example, nothingness is conceived of as a point of intercession between two (seemingly) incompatible worlds or elements. The gap between the world of the play and that of the audience is perhaps the most fundamental extension of Shakespeare's Wall metaphor. Though the audience may experience the feeling of being physically proximate to the performance, there remains, in Sartre's terms "an impassable distance" between actor and audience: "The actor is so distant that I can see him but will never be able to touch him or act upon him" (cited in Ben Chaim, 1984, 17). In other words, a sense of nothingness can be seen as underpinning the tensions and dualities which constitute so much that is specific to theatrical experience. These dualities are nowhere better described that in Bert O. States' *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre*, where he suggests that there is a fundamental tension in theatre between the object as "thing" and the object as "image." States draws attention to specific objects that seem to resist becoming seamlessly absorbed into the world of a play. On stage, a working clock, a fountain, or fire retain "a certain primal strangeness;" the water fountain is "a happening taking place within the aesthetic world: with running water something indisputably real leaks out of the illusion" (1985: 31). States' distinction between "thing" and "image" is strongly reminiscent of Sartre's dualistic approach to perception and imaginary object, which he develops in his work *The Psychology of Imagination* (1972). Here Sartre argues that imagination, by positing nothingness, negates the world of perceptual reality.[4] As is suggested in States' example of the water fountain, however, in theatre there is a tug of war between the object as-vehicle-for-"illusion" and the "indisputable" reality of the object. Acts of imagination in theatre do not

amount simply to the substitution of an existent reality for a hypothetical reality (or unreality), but often involve an oscillation between different perceptual registers.

An emphasis on imagination as a central element in theatrical performance—or in determining what theatre *should* be like—has been a key feature of attempts to formulate a theatrical aesthetic that would counter the tendency to construct detailed illusion. From a perspective which foregrounds the collusive act of imagination, the reality of the stage and its properties is that which should be highlighted and played upon. As Peter Brook put it, the stage should be "freed from any decorative statement that confines the imagination" (Brook, 1993, 116). One of the most recognisable "Brookian" techniques involves, as Colin Counsell points out, employing objects "synechdochally", (whereby a part represents a greater whole) and "metaphorically" (Counsell, 1996, 149). Thus a single wheel represents a chariot in *The Mahabharata* (1985), an industrial cable spool represents a war machine in *Ubu aux Bouffes* (1978), or spinning plates are used to depict flowers in the forest of Arden in*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1970). Theatre which turns away from illusion and naturalistic scenography and stops being about a specific time and place, instead opting for the transformative potentials of the "empty space" becomes more about what is happening "now" between actors and audience. As Brook notes, "The essence of theatre is within a mystery called 'the present moment'" (Brook, 1993, 81).

Peter Brook's famous invocation of the phrase in his book *The Empty Space* is premised on a gap between the visible and the invisible; "the stage," Brook suggests, "is a place where the invisible can appear."[5] Brook's empty space is suggestive of a stage that would not set out to represent the world as it familiarly appears to us, but that the stage should be a place of creativity which engages the audience in imaginative acts, problematising the validity of the world-as-perceived. Hence Peter Brook's repeated emphases on modes of theatrical representation in different historical and cultural contexts which reveal the world as

transformational process. As Robert Corrigan, explaining Peter Brook theatrical philosophy puts it:

> The base root of the theatrical event is its transformational character, and when it has been most vital the empty space of the stage has been transformed into the 'sacred space' of the play. (Corrigan, 1984, 157)

Emptiness in Brook, as with nothingness in Sartre, is not a literal facet of what Brook would call the "visible" world. The Elizabethan stage that Brook takes as an exemplar was clearly no more "empty" than Lao Tzu's hollow vessel is "nothing;" both instances seem to offer a possibility of transformation and creation rather than nullification. But how specifically can theatre create "nothing"?

In their article "What do Brook's Bricks Mean?: Toward a Theory of the Mobility of Objects in Theatrical Discourse" (1981), Avigal and Rimmon-Kenan provide an analysis of the use of objects in Peter Brook's *Ubu aux Bouffes*, a 1978 production of two of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu* plays. This article deals with the transformative nature of the theatrical object in this Brook production, particularly in relation to two dominant physical elements; a large wooden wheel and a collection of building bricks. Throughout the performance, the actors interact with these and other objects to construct fictional locations and fields of activity. Avigal and Rimmon-Kenan discuss an episode from the production whereby the actress playing Mère Ubu brings a "handful" of bricks onto the middle of the stage and arranges them around the wheel. As they explain, "The bricks function here both as plates and as various items of food she is preparing for her guests" (Avigal and Rimmon-Kenan, 1981, 28). Avigal and Rimmon-Kenan derive several possible "sentences" from what follows:

- an actress puts bricks on a wheel …
- Mrs Ubu lays the table, putting bricks on it …
- An actress makes setting and props out of bricks

In the same scene, the actor playing Père Ubu snatches a brick from the table, making gestures of biting and chewing. Potential sentences:

- the actor pretends to eat bricks
- Ubu eats a chicken. (Avigal and Rimmon-Kenan, 1981, 28).

Avigal and Rimmon-Kenan would see such moments as instances of a "simultaneous participation [of theatrical objects] in different semantic fields, leading to an incessant 'semantization' and 'resematization' (semantic mobility)" (Avigal and Rimmon-Kenan, 1981, 13). While it is not my intention here to investigate theatrical representation in relation to its supposed participation within semantic structures, I would like instead to consider how such moments of theatricality might relate to the Sartrean concept of nothingness. Two possibilities, such as that of the "actor pretending to eat bricks" and "Ubu eating a chicken" existing within one theatrical image, possibilities that are irreconcilable, are seen to be existing simultaneously. A "nothingness" is created from the mutual negation of the contradictory elements that comprise the image; our awareness of the actor's presence is at odds with our acceptance of the character's presence. At the same time the representation of "Ubu eating a chicken" in fictional time/place is belied by the fact that the audience see an actor in front them doing something that seems to be at odds with the representation. Of course, in one sense this point could be applied to theatrical representation in a much wider sense; actors playing characters are not the same as the characters they are playing and hence there is typically a disparity between the stage as a medium and those things that are represented on the stage. However, as David Saltz notes in "How to Do Things on Stage", this disparity is not always made explicit to the audience:

> Actors commit real actions, and often those actions can be just the actions they seem to be committing. When the character raises an arm, the actor really raises an arm; and when the character, in raising that arm, is reaching for a glass, the actor really reaches for a glass. Occasionally, an actor may really commit an action only under some of its descriptions. But only in the case of actions inappropriate or impractical on stage, such as murdering, must the actor resort to committing an action that is radically different from the character's (Saltz, 1991, 33).

Inevitably, actors onstage, even when playing characters in a fictional world, will actually *do* lots of things which are not (merely) pretended. Indeed, in terms of the actor's *activities* onstage - even within fictional dramatic matrices - many of the actions that an actor may represent are actions which they also carry out. It is only, as Saltz points out, when it becomes impractical for the actor to commit the actions of the character, that the actor is compelled to commit an action "that is radically different from the character."

In the case of Brook's *Ubu Aux Bouffes*, however, the disparity between the actors' actions (laying bricks on a wheel, pretending to eat them etc) and the actions of the characters (laying a table, eating a chicken) can hardly be explained in terms of the impracticality of having the actors actually commit the represented actions. I would suggest that the nature of theatricality here is connected to Brook's concept of theatre as the "invisible-made-visible" which is underpinned by the concept of nothingness. Saltz's description of theatrical representation in which actors really commit the same kind of actions as the characters would conform to an understanding of theatre which remains in what Brook terms "the visible." A visual congruence between medium and representation tends to reinforce a sense that the world is made up of the tangible material realm which is readily available to perception. A total commitment to the visible/material is clearly at odds with Brook's philosophy, upon which he expounds in the following terms:

> Essentially we are talking of making the invisible visible. Virtually all modern theatre recognises this vast, partly Freudian world, where behind the seen gesture of a spoken word lies an invisible zone, the site that drives the ego and the superego, the repressed; what is conscious and unconscious and behind that lies another zone, more distant and invisible that the former … it contains very powerful sources of energy. (Dundjerović, 2007, 36)

To make visible an "invisible zone" upon the stage requires a problematization of the perceptual, in which the audience experience a contradiction between that which is material and directly perceived (actors committing actions) and that which immaterial and not part of the visible world (the characters within a fictional world). To invoke Sartre's distinction between perception and imagination, as audience we*perceive* the actor pretending to eat bricks and simultaneously *imagine* the character eating food. Although Sartre does not give the semi-mystical status the invisible/imaginary as Brook does, the imaginary is nonetheless vital if consciousness is to generate nothingness, with all the potential for radical freedom that the concept guarantees. The invisible/imaginary serves as an alternative to the

visible/perceptual; it is ultimately formless and empty, capable of undermining the pre-given fixity of the materially visible.

To apply Sartre's perception-imagination distinction to the example of Brook's *Ubu Aux Bouffes*, however, is also to problematise the distinction. Sartre suggests that imagination "negates" perception; consciousness asserts its freedom by pushing the perceived out of the way. In the case of *Ubu*, however, both the perceived and the imaginary seem to operate side by side; we see actors manipulating bricks and being characters in a domestic environment at the same time. The perceptual mechanisms at work here seem to generate similar questions as those raised in Ludwig Wittgenstein's discussion of "seeing as" in his work *Philosophical Investigations*. Here Wittgenstein uses the example of a drawing by American psychologist Joseph Jastrow of a "duck-rabbit," a drawing which can be taken to resemble either the head of a duck or a rabbit, depending on whether two interconnected shapes extending from an oval form are seen as "ears" or a "beak." Wittgenstein seems to leave the question as to what it means to "see" a duck or a rabbit (and whether the seeing of one excludes the seeing of the other) open to question. E.H. Gombrich, however, in his classic study *Art and Illusion*, makes much use of the duck-rabbit image, and is in no doubt that "although we can switch from one reading to another … we cannot experience alternative readings at the same time" (Gombrich, 1982, 5). In Sartre's terms, we might say that the viewer chooses to see the duck and in doing so "nihilates" the rabbit. With respect to the actor/character distinctions in the example of *Ubu* on the other hand, it does not seem plausible that we could not "experience the alternative readings at the same time" since the very point of the theatrical strategy seems to point towards a *both-and* rather than an*either-or*.

One crucial difference between the duck-rabbit and the Brookian approach is that whereas the duck and rabbit seem to have an only arbitrary connection with one another (it "so happens" than one can see one or the other, depending), the actors manipulating bricks and Ubu at supper have, as Colin Counsell would point out, a "metaphorical" connection, in the

same way that spinning plates in *A Midsummer Nights' Dream* become metaphors for the magical forest. Avigal and Rimmon extend this observation to a more general level in relation to Peter Brook's work:

> The actor's capacity to subject the 'poor' objects to his creative imagination is thus seen as a metaphor of freedom, of man's ability to liberate himself from the materialistic terror of an alienated world of mass consumption (Avigal and Rimmon-Kenan, 1981, 22).

While this observation seems to contain more than a hint of Sartrean existentialism, Peter Brook's theatre is not necessarily congruent with Sartre's dualism. The transcendental aspects of Sartre's thought contain traces of Platonism, in which the material world is radically opposed to a more authentic realm, which relates to "Being" and "Nothingness" for Sartre, or in Plato's case, Ideal Forms. Indeed, in *The Last Days of Socrates*, Plato specifically draws a contrast between "visible" and "invisible" realms:

> "… we should assume two classes of things, one visible, and the other invisible … the invisible being invariable, and the visible never being the same … soul is more like the invisible, and the body more like the visible." (Plato, 1969, 130)

Brook's insistence on an apparent duality between the visible and invisible seems, on the surface at least, to conform to Platonic ideas, and the related conceptual schema in Sartre's radical division between the perceptual and the imaginary. Indeed, Brook's concept of theatre as the "invisible-made-visible" might even apply directly to Plato's account of what it means to be a philosopher – one who "remains in the realm of the absolute, constant and invariable" (Plato, 1969, 131). In practice, however, Brook's theatre does not seem to conform to this model. Despite Brook's apparent desire to privilege the invisible over the visible, the theatre of Brook does not simply posit an invisible realm over and above the visible, for both the visible/material and the invisible/representational operate simultaneously. By creating self-negating images Brook's theatre demonstrates that nothingness can operate even with a materially abundant medium. While in no way denying the material basis of theatrical representation, the "emptiness" of Brook's stage allows for a reorientation of perception rather than a (re)confirmation of the visible, a material structure within which the imaginary can dwell.

References

Avigal, Shoshana & Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith, 1981, "What do Brook's Bricks Mean?: Toward a Theory of the Mobility of Objects in Theatrical Discourse", in *Poetics Today* Vo. 2 No. 3 (Spring) pp. 11-34.

Beckett, Samuel, 1994, *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* London: Calder Publications.

Ben Chaim, Daphna, 1984, *Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetics of Audience Response*. Michigan: Ann Arbor Press.

Brook, Peter, 1990, *The Empty Space*, Reprinted Edition, London: Penguin.

Brook, Peter, 1993, *There Are No Secrets,* London: Methuen.

Brook, Peter, 1999, *Between Two Silences*, Edited by Dale Moffit, London: Methuen.

Corrigan, Robert, 1984, "The Search for New Endings: The Theatre in Search of a Fix, Part III" in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (May), pp. 153-163.

Counsell, Colin, 1996, *Signs of Performance: An Introduction to Twentieth Century Theatre*, London: Routledge.

Dundjerović, Aleksander, 2007, *The Theatricality of Robert Lepage*, Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press

Gombrich, Ernst, 1982, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Fifth Edition, Oxford: Phaidon Press.

Grotowski, Jerzy, 1991, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Edited by Eugenio Barba with a Preface by Peter Brook, London: Methuen.

Gussin, Graham & Carpenter, Ele, 2001, *Nothing*, London: August and Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art.

Handke, Peter, 1971, *Offending the Audience and Self Accusation*, Traslated by Michael Roloff, London: Methuen.

Kovács, András, 2006, "Sartre, the Philosophy of Nothingness, and the Modern Melodrama" in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 64, No. 1, (Winter) pp. 135-145.

Plato, 1969, *The Last Days of Socrates*, Translated with Introduction by Hugh Tredennick, Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Saltz, David, 1991, "How to Do Things Onstage", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 49, No. 1, pp. 31-45.

Sartre, Jean-Paul, 1972, *The Psychology of Imagination*, Translated from the French, London: Methuen.

Sartre, Jean-Paul, 2003, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, Translated by Hazel Barnes, Introduction by Mary Warnock, London: Routledge.

---

[1] William Carroll points out that "The 'vacuum' of modern particle physics, whose fluctuations supposedly brings our universe into existence, is not absolutely nothing. It is only nothing like our present universe, but it is still something. How else could 'it' fluctuate?" *Thomas Aquinas and Big Bang Cosmology* available at http://maritain.nd.edu/jmc/ti/carroll.htm. Accessed 21/06/10.

[2] See chapter 11 of the *Tao Te Ching*, available at http://www.wussu.com/laotzu/laotzu11.html, translation by Gia-fu Feng and Jane English. Accessed 21/06/10.

[3] I should note, however, that Garner's notion of actuality is, as he puts it, "fuelled by difference and absence" and therefore does not exist in complete opposition to representation.

[4] "For consciousness to be able to imagine, it must be able to escape from the world by its very nature; it must be able by its own efforts to withdraw from the world. In a word it must be free. Thus the thesis of unreality has yielded us the possibility of negation as its condition" (Sartre, 1972, 213).

[5] Significantly, Kovács explains Sartre's concept of nothing as "an empty space": Between what is and what could be there is a gap, an empty space, where man is free to choose. Nothingness is an empty moment in the world, where man is liberated from his past and has to choose (Kovács, 2006, 137).